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Author(s): Mahnaz Moazami

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Mahnaz Moazami

EVIL ANIMALS IN THE ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION

Animals in various cultural contexts are viewed in different ways in large part because of religious influences. The basis of the ancient Egyptians' close relationships to animals was religious. Innumerable representations of animals in tombs and royal funerary monuments, as well as the use of such animals as amuletic objects, are evidence of this relationship. Animals were associated with all manifestations of piety, worship, myths, and traditions in the Greek religion. All data show the important part that animals have taken in religion's pragmatic responses to individual and collective needs. The relationships between humans and gods were cemented by offerings and sacrifices of animals that often constituted the pillars of ancient religious practice. To develop a more diverse and comprehensive context for understanding human-animal relations, the perspective of religious traditions is invaluable. As the roles of animals appear to have been essential in Zoroastrian religion, in this article I would like to discuss points concerning *xrafstar*s, "evil animals," in an attempt to show their importance in ritual practices in the tradition as represented in the available Zoroastrian literature. It should be noted, however, that Zoroastrian texts present some problems concerning the interpretation, the compilation, and the age of the materials that they transmit. Their final composition took place in the ninth and tenth centuries, but they are extant only in manuscripts dating from the thirteenth century and later. It should also be noted that, as information regarding *xrafstar*s are partly

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preserved in the Avestan texts, the Pahlavi books and later recorded tradition are discussed more particularly here.

Dualism is the most characteristic element of the Zoroastrian religion, and dualism affected all aspects of Iranian civilization, especially during the Sasanian period (224–651 CE). The religious thought of Zarathustra is based on oppositions between good and evil, order and chaos, light and darkness, and life and death. All that is good arises from the creativity of the Beneficent Spirit (Ohrmazd), and all evil comes from the Evil Spirit (Ahriman). In the ninth-century Pahlavi books, this dualism is omnipresent. Good and evil forces are presented in an almost perfect symmetry, and for each good creature a symmetrical evil corresponds. The animal world is likewise divided between "beneficial" animals, creatures of the Beneficent Spirit, and "maleficent" animals, creatures of the Evil Spirit. The partition of animals as beneficial or maleficent represents one of the most important and original aspects of the ancient Iranian religious worldview.

Beneficial animals were worthy to be sacrificed at special occasions, were edible, played an important role in religious rituals, were an integral element of myths and legends, and inhabited the earth for the purpose of serving humans. In this respect there were abundant religious laws and edicts to ensure their proper protection. However, maleficent or evil animals were believed to be issued from the Evil Spirit and were classified as his agents; they were brought into being to serve as his allies in his struggle to harm the ordered world.[1] Consequently, they all have a negative nature and belong to the chthonian universe. They are created not only against the beneficial creatures, but also against water, earth, and plants; they are vectors of pollution, impurity, and calamity that continually strive to expand the world of evil, and killing them is therefore a duty, because Zoroastrians believe that all humans must contribute to the defense of good creation and its ultimate redemption, which will occur only if all sacred creation maintains ritual purity and combats all forms of impurity.

According to the *Bundahišn,* at the beginning, Ohrmazd created from his own essence, from material light, the forms of his own creatures, in the form of fire: bright, white, round, and manifest from afar.[2] The Evil Spirit created his own creatures from material darkness, in the form of a frog: black, ashen, worthy of darkness, and evil, like the most sinful-natured *xrafstar.*[3]

[1] *Bundahišn,* TD1, ed. Tahmuras Dinshah (Tehran, 1970), fols. 16v., 19v., 20r.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* ed. B. T. Anklesaria (Bombay, 1956), 49, 57; *The Dādestan ī Dēnīk,* ed. M. Jafari-Dehaghi (Paris, 1998), chap. 36.40.

[2] *Bundahišn,* fol. 5r.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 44.

[3] *Bundahišn,* fol. 5r.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 44.

The word *xrafstar* (Avestan *xrafstra-,* Pahlavi *xrafstar*) has been variously interpreted, and its exact meaning is much disputed. It occurs both in the *Gāthā*s and in later texts. The traditional interpretation is that Zarathustra used it in the *Gāthā*s (Yasna 28.5; 34.5) pejoratively for "the enemies of the religion."[4] Others see in it a reference to evil animals whom Zarathustra chose to exclude from the sacred place of worship and hence symbolically from the whole good creation.[5] H. W. Bailey suggested that the term is a derivation of an Indo-European verbal base *√*(s)ker-, (s)kerp-, (s)krep-* "to bite, sting, cut," which looks promising.[6] However, the *kṛt* suffix *-tra-* is never formed on an *s*-extension. There is a great likelihood that there were two different terms in Iranian *daēvic* (demoniac) vocabulary, as we have **prystr* in Manichean Middle Persian, and *plstr* is attested in the *Bundahišn* (TD2).[7] Therefore, the term can be derived from *fra-pt-tar,* "things that fly-creep."[8]

In the Young *Avesta* and Middle Persian texts the term *xrafstar* is used specifically for reptiles and amphibians such as frogs, scorpions, lizards, and snakes, and insects such as ants, beetles, and locusts. In general, any animal that crept, crawled, pricked, bit, or stung, and seemed hideous and repulsive to human beings, was a *xrafstar.* Predators such as felines and wolves were also creatures of Evil Spirit, but in the same texts they are referred to as *dadān,* "wild animals, beasts."

The *Bundahišn* states that the physical existence of the *xrafstar*s, the shining of their eyes, and their psychic wind are of the Beneficent Spirit, but their spirit of sinfulness and malevolence are of Ahriman, which is of great advantage, since when men see them they can either kill or avoid them.[9]

Evil animals did not receive the same systematic attention as did beneficent animals, but a classification of them is found in the *Avesta* and later Zoroastrian literatures.[10] It goes without saying that evil animals were classified according to the dualistic criteria that prevailed in the Zoroastrian faith. The *Vidēvdād* gives a long list of the evil animals that Zoroastrians

[4] Christian Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* (Strasburg, 1904; repr., Berlin, 1961), col. 538.

[5] Helmut Humbach, *The Gāthās of Zarathustra and the Other Old Avestan Text* (Heidelberg, 1991), pt. 1, 118, 140; pt. 2, 24, 107. Kellens proposed that the term approximately means "affreux, sauvage"; see J. Kellens and E. Pirart, *Les Textes Vieil-Avestiques* (Wiesbaden, 1990), 2:231.

[6] H. W. Bailey, "A Range of Iranica," in *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume,* ed. M. Boyce and I. Gershevitch (London, 1970), 25–28.

[7] *Bûndahishn,* TD 2, ed. E. T. D. Anklesaria (Bombay, 1908), 143.9.

[8] I. Gershevitch, *A Grammar of Manichean Sogdian* (Oxford, 1954), add. 62, 246.

[9] *Bundahišn,* fols. 58v., 59r.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 183.

[10] On this subject see H.-P. Schmidt, "Ancient Iranian Animal Classification," *Studien Zur Indologie und Iranistik* 5–6 (1980): 209–44.

must kill.[11] It starts with snakes, followed by reptiles and amphibians, then insects and worms, and ends with flying insects:

aži udarō.θrąsa, "snake crawling on its belly"
aži spaka kahrpuna, "snake dog lizard"
kasyapa, "tortoise"
vazaγa dāδmainiia, "puffed-up frog"
vazaγa upāpa, "water-frog"
maoiri dānō karša, "corn-carrying ant"
maoiri araēka kutaka, "small ant, not leaving anything"
pazdu gūθō.varəta, "dung worm"
maxši ərəγaiiti, "fly"

The *Bundahišn* has separate chapters for *xrafstrān* and *gurgān,* "wolves." It divides evil animals by whether they live in the water, on earth, or in the air—of the water, the frog; of the earth, the many-headed dragon; and of the air, the winged snake are the worst.[12] In the *Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādistān ī Dēnīg* we find a much longer list, in which these animals are grouped according to species. The order of the animals though, is quite different from that given by the *Vidēvdād* and the *Bundahišn;* other genera are added that may be of a later addition.

Bundahišn[13]	*Pahlavi Rivāyat*[14]
mār sardag, "snake species"	*mār-ē pad parr,* "winged snake"
gazdum sardag, "scorpion species"	*wak,* "frog"
karbūg sardag, "lizard species"	*mōr,* "ant"
pazūg sardag, "dung-worm species"	*mār,* "snake"
kirm ī abrēšom sardag, "silk-worm species"	*gazdum,* "scorpion"
mōr sardag, "ant species"	*pazūg ī gird,* "round worm"
magas kāskēn sardag, "fly species"	*karzang,* "crab"
**sarābāg,* "*sea-crab"	*karbūg,* "lizard"
mayg/malax sardag, "locust species"	*kašawag,* "tortoise"
paxšag sardag, "gnat species"	*magas ī kirm-rēz,* "worm-producing fly"
kayk, "flea"	*gunz,* "cricket"[15]

[11] *Vendidād* (*Vidēvdād*), ed. D. H. Jamasp (Bombay, 1907), chap. 14.5–6. The Pahlavi translation renders these terms as: *azi uδraišag, azi sag karbunag, kašawag, wazaγ ān ī zamīg, wazaγ ī ābīg, mōr dānkēš, mōr ī *halag, pazūg gūh-ward,* and *maxš ērang.*

[12] *Bundahišn,* fol. 59r.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 183.

[13] *Bundahišn,* fols. 59r., 59v.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 185.

[14] *The Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg,* ed. A. V. Williams (Copenhagen, 1990), chap. 21.45–46.

[15] The manuscript has on the margin *gwnj,* written in Persian alphabet; see M. Moʿin, *Farhang-e Fārsi* (Tehran, 1983), 3:3474, for *gunz, gunž-ada,* "cricket."

parrag sardag, "winged creatures species"
wazaγ sardag, "frog species"
garzag ī nasā brīn, "corpse-rending snake"
kayk, "flea"

The practice of killing evil animals was recorded by Herodotus when he describes Magian practices: the Magi kill animals of all kinds with their own hands, excepting dogs and men. They even seem to take a delight in the task and kill them as readily as they do ants, snakes, and other flying or creeping things.[16] Plutarch also refers to good and evil creatures: of the good animals, he mentions dogs, birds, and hedgehogs; of the evil creatures, only water rats. He also adds that Persians celebrate those who have killed the greatest quantities of these animals.[17]

In late Sasanian times, Agathias (ca. 536–82 CE) comments on a festival called "the removal of evil": the festival participants "kill a multitude of reptiles, and all other wild and desert-living animals, and bring them to the Magi, as though as a sign of piety. In this way they think that they are doing what pleases the good god, but they hurt and offend Arimanes."[18] Until the mid-nineteenth century, "the Zoroastrians of Kerman kept up an annual observance called *kharastar-kōšī,* when members of the community went out into the plains around the city and slew as many *kharastars* as they could. This observance took place at the feast of Spandarmad, earth goddess, since it is the earth she protects and it is the crops it produces which suffer most from the ravages of *xrafstar*s."[19]

In the *Avesta* there is an exorcism for the extirpation of evil creatures that infest the earth: "I want to sacrifice to the star Wanant [Vega], the strong, that we invoke for its name, which is healer, to ward off the cursed and filthy evil animals of the Evil Spirit."[20]

The duty of each Zoroastrian in this world is to diminish the power of Evil, and killing evil animals is one way to accomplish this duty. According to the religious laws, the earth should be protected against evil animals, the impious, and demons, and it should be made productive through irriga-

[16] Herodotus *Histories,* 1:140.

[17] Plutarch, *Isis et Osiris,* trans. M. Meunier (Paris, 1924), 46, 148; see also J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés* (Paris, 1938), 1:85.

[18] Agathias, *The Histories,* trans. J. D. Frendo (Berlin, 1975), bk. 2, sec. 24; sec. 10, 59.

[19] Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism,* vol. 1 (Leiden, 1975), 299; see also N. K. Firby, *European Travellers and Their Perceptions of Zoroastrians in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Berlin, 1988).

[20] Wanant, literally the "Conquering One," chief star of the southern quarter, is the guardian of the apertures against demons, so that they may not block the passage of sun, moon, and stars; *Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī xrad,* ed. P. Sanjana (Bombay, 1895), chap. 49.12. Quote is in *Yašt,* 20.1 (J. Darmester, *Le Zend-Avesta: Annals du Musée Guimet,* 3 vols. [Paris, 1892; repr., 1960]); see also J. J. Modi, "Nirang-I-Jashan-I-Burzigarân," in *Anthropological Papers* (Bombay, 1912), 1:22–30.

tion and cultivation.[21] According to the *Vidēvdād,* chief among disturbed places in the world are the ridge of Mount Arzur, the gate of hell where the demons run together, where dead dogs or dead men are buried, where tombs (*daxma*) are made, and also where the burrows of evil animals are. One who destroys them will satisfy the earth.[22]

Zoroastrian literature does describe certain rituals whose performance includes evil animals. According to the *Dēnkard,* "People ought to do these three things every day in this manner: to drive [the demon of] putrefaction from their body; to profess the faith of the religion; and to perform good deeds. To drive [the demon of] putrefaction from their body is this: to wash one's hands and face before sunrise. Profession of faith is this: to worship the sun. To perform good deeds is this: to kill several reptiles."[23]

According to the instruction of Adurpād Mahraspandān, the high priest of Shapur II (309–79 CE), one is specially obligated to kill evil creatures on Dēn rōz, the twenty-fourth day of the month.[24] When killing evil animals, one should always say: "I smite and kill [them] for the sake of ridding myself of sin, for virtue and love of [my] soul."[25]

According to the *Zādspram,* the second of the five obligations prescribed for Zoroastrian priests consisted of distinguishing between beneficial animals and evil ones, and one of their professional implements was the "*xrafstar*-killer," called in Middle Persian *mārgan,* or "snake-killer"; it is described as a stick with a piece of leather attached to the end.[26] According to the *Bundahišn,* every Zoroastrian should possess a snake-killer, that he may perform the meritorious act of striking and killing evil-working animals with it.[27]

The merit of killing evil animals is emphasized in the Middle Persian texts time and again; their destruction is often a means of atonement for grave sins. For instance, if a child whose father and mother are both wicked dies before the age of seven, the soul of that child goes with them to hell.

[21] *The Complete Texts of the Pahlavi Dinkard,* ed. D. M. Madan, 2 vols. (Bombay, 1911), bk. 5, 452.

[22] *Vidēvdād,* chap. 3.7–10, 22; *Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī xrad,* chap. 5; *The Supplementary Texts to the Šāyest-nē-Šāyest,* ed. F. W. P. Kotwal (Copenhagen, 1969), chap. 13.19.

[23] Shaul Shaked, *The Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages (Dēnkard VI)* (Boulder, CO, 1979), chap. 317, 127; *Šāyast-nē-Šāyast: A Pahlavi Text on Religious Customs,* ed. Jehangir C. Tavadia (Hamburg, 1930), chap. 20.5.

[24] *The Pahlavi Texts,* ed. J. M. Jamasp-Asana (Bombay, 1897–1913), 70.

[25] Ibid., 123 (*zanēm ōzanēm wināh wizārišn ud kirbag ī ruwān došārm rāy*); *Saddar Nasr and Saddar Bundehesh,* ed. E. B. N. Dhabhar (Bombay, 1932), chap. 43, 33–34.

[26] *Anthologie de Zādspram,* ed. Ph. Gignoux and A. Tafazzoli (Paris, 1993), chap. 27.2. *Vidēvdād,* chaps. 14.8; 18.2; for the term "*xrafstar*-killer," see J. Kellens, *Les Noms-Racines de l'Avesta* (Wiesbaden, 1974), 162.

[27] *Bundahišn,* fols. 77v., 78r.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 239; J. de Menasce, *Le Troisième livre du Dēnkart* (Paris, 1973), chap. 48, 58–59; see also Ph. Gignoux, "Contacts culturels entre Manichéisme et Mazdéisme: Quelques exemples significatifs," *Studia Orientalia* 70 (1993): 65–73.

But if they assemble a name fire for the child and kill evil animals, then the child's soul will separate from the mother and father and will not go to hell.[28] Or when one commits a sin against water, killing frogs and other evil creatures belonging to water will atone for the water sin.[29] A woman suffering from an unusually long menstruation can properly cleanse herself by killing two hundred corn-carrying ants if it is summer and other evil animals if it is winter.[30] An atonement for a man who has committed the sin of having sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman is that he should strike a thousand biting snakes, two thousand other snakes, a thousand earth-frogs, two thousand water-frogs, a thousand corn-carrying ants, and two thousand tree ants.[31] Moreover, since the destruction of evil creatures is good in itself, it can be practiced in a general way like any other good deed to compensate for both unintentional and deliberate violations. Thus the *Šāyast-nē-Šāyast* sets out the following acts of atonement: "Who extinguishes a fire, by him are to be gathered ten fires, and by him are to be borne ten punishments, and by him are to be killed ten ants, and by him is to be presented animal-fat to the Fire of Wahrām."[32]

A person whose life was wicked and full of sins could escape his punishment, at least in part, by killing evil animals. Ardā Virāz saw the soul of a man whose body was put in a brazen caldron to be cooked forever. One foot, the right one, remained outside the caldron. This was the soul of the wicked man, who when alive had gone often to married women with lustful and improper desires. His whole body became sinful, except this right foot, with which he had smitten, killed, and destroyed many frogs, ants, snakes, scorpions, and other evil creatures.[33] Performing such rituals could also benefit others: "If a priest is very able, he may sell vermin [*xrafstar*] which he has caught for a price; both parties thus acquire twofold merit:

[28] *The Pahlavi Rivāyat,* chap. 8.7–8.

[29] *Šāyast-nē-Šāyast,* chap. 8.19, 13.

[30] *Vidēvdād,* chap. 16.11–12; see also *Šāyast-nē-Šāyast,* chap. 3.21, 80; and *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others,* ed. E. B. N. Dhabhar (Bombay, 1932), 520–21: "Killing noxious creatures is said to be a great merit in the religion, and although a petty small noxious creature is killed, then will be great compensation for it in the spiritual world. If one kills a serpent and recites the *Avesta* for it, it will be as much merit as when a person takes two priests to his house and causes the *Yasna* service to be performed for him. If one kills a mouse, it will be a merit of 50 *tanāfurs.* And if a corn-carrying ant is killed, it will be as much as killing a lion of the forest or as much as having restored the sight of a blind man. If one kills a *kuza* called in Arabic *mur* or *murcha,* it will be a merit equivalent to setting right one involved in calamity. If they kill a lion or a wolf or a tiger and such wild animals, then as much merit will accrue."

[31] *Vidēvdād,* chap. 18.73.

[32] *Šāyast-nē-Šāyast,* chap. 7.9, 102; see also *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others,* 269–70.

[33] *Le Livre d'Ardā Virāz,* ed. Ph. Gignoux (Paris, 1984), chap. 60, 194. *Ardā Virāz Nāmag,* the book of Ardā Virāz, contains descriptions of the fates of the just and the damned and various punishments awaiting the damned in hell.

both for catching it and for killing it. If one has performed the meritorious act of killing, but has not done the catching, even so that [person's merit] is no less."[34] "It was in the highest heaven that Ardā Vīrāz saw the souls of those who had killed many evil animals in the world. The *xwarrah* of the waters and sacred fires, and of [all other] fires, and plants, and also the *xwarrah* of the earth, was ever increased thereby; and they were exalted and adorned."[35]

In the *Farziāt nāmah* it is said that, when Ardā Virāz went to see the other world, he found that the place where the souls of those who killed evil animals lived was so pleasant that he himself would have liked to stay there. But the Ameshaspands asked him to return and preach for the destruction of evil animals because the creatures of the Good Spirit are saved by their destruction, and even the bodies of the creation of the Evil Spirit are destroyed.[36]

In the Zoroastrian literature, evil animals belong to the darkness, and it is during the night that they intrigue and inspire more fear and aggression.[37] These animals are agents of the Evil Spirit and the means of punishment of the wicked in hell.

Hell is situated in the north, the direction of the demons, under the earth.[38] It is described as dark, narrow, stinking, very cold, and full of evil animals.[39] It is stated in the *Dēnkard* that, in hell, because of the proximity of demons, the souls of the sinful appear in the shapes of snakes, lizards, scorpions, and other evil animals.[40] The smallest of them are as big as mountains, and all devour and destroy the souls of the wicked.[41]

Kerdīr, the Sasanian high priest, in his account of his vision of Paradise, which dates from the reign of Wahrām II (276–93), says that on passing the Cinvat Bridge, his double sees in the well of hell all kinds of evil animals, such as snakes, lizards, and scorpions.[42]

[34] *The Hērbedestān and Nērangestān,* ed. F. Kotwal and Ph. Kreyenbroek (Paris, 1995), vol. 2, chap. 7.5.

[35] *Xwarrah,* "glory, divine grace," comparable with Greek *tyche* or Roman *fortuna.* Gignoux, ed., *Le Livre d'Ardā Virāz,* chap. 14, 167.

[36] Avestan, *amaša spaṇta-,* "Revitalizing Immortals," the name of six divine beings that play an important role in Zoroastrian religion. J. J. Modi, *The Persian Farziât-nâmeh and Kholâseh-I dîn of Dastur Dârâb Pâhlan* (Bombay, 1924), text 32, trans. 46.

[37] De Menasce, *Le Troisième livre du Dēnkart,* chap. 188, 195.

[38] *Vidēvdād,* chap. 3, 7.

[39] Gignoux, ed., *Le Livre d'Ardā Virāz,* chap. 54, 191; *Dādestān ī Dēnīg,* chap. 26, 86–87.

[40] De Menasce, *Le Troisième livre du Dēnkart,* chap. 22, 41.

[41] Gignoux, ed., *Le Livre d'Ardā Virāz,* chap. 18, 173–74.

[42] Ph. Gignoux, *Les quatre inscriptions du mage Kirdir* (Paris, 1991); *Kerdīr Sar Mašhal* (*KSM*) 40, "*Mār ud karzang ud karbunag ud any xrafstar purr ēstēd;* see also P. O. Skjaervø, "Kirdir's Vision: Translation and Analyses," in *Archaeologische Mitteilungen Aus Iran,* Band 16 (Berlin, 1983), 269–306.

Ardā Virāz, in his extraterrestrial voyage, devotes a major part of his account to the description of hell and the punishments inflicted on the damned. Several chapters describe the most horrible punishments and tortures performed by the evil animals and adapted to the sins committed by the wicked, namely, adulterers, fornicators, pederasts, prostitutes, liars, and those who have sex with a woman during her period. A frequent theme is the punishment of women by evil animals; they travel into the woman's body and out again through the mouth, nose, ears, anus, and vagina.[43]

However, evil creatures are not always harmful, and the existence of these animals is not completely useless. The appreciation of the usefulness of evil creatures is a well-known theme in antiquity. A midrashic work, probably of the tenth century, expressly declared that "forbidden animals and reptiles were brought into the world only [in order to serve] as medicines for the sons of man upon earth." It is expressed also in the Talmud: "Of all the Holy one, blessed be He, created, there is not one thing for no purpose; He created the snail [as a remedy] for a scab; the fly [in a crushed state to be applied as an ointment] for [the sting of] a hornet; the mosquito [to be similarly applied] for [the bite of] a serpent; the serpent for a sore; and the spider for [the bite of] a scorpion."[44] About a hundred years later, the church father St. Jerome wrote that "all animals which are not created for food exist to serve as medicines."[45]

According to the *Bundahišn,* the Beneficent Spirit in his omniscience diverts these evil animals to the benefit of his creatures.[46] Their bodies are used in the composition of remedies with a mixture of drugs because they are from the four beneficial elements: water, earth, wind, and fire.[47]

Certain wild animals belong to the Beneficent Spirit, and if people unintentionally or deliberately kill them, they have to compensate for this sin by killing many evil animals, thus contributing to the preservation of the domination of good creation. There are also evil animals from which human beings can benefit: the bee prepares honey, the silkworm produces silk, and many species of evil animals kill each other.[48]

[43] Gignoux, ed., *Le Livre d'Ardā Virāz,* chap. 69, 200.

[44] I. Jakobovits, "The Medical Treatment of Animals in Jewish Law," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 7, nos. 1–2 (1956): 210.

[45] Ibid. Jerome *Contra Jovinian* 2:6, quoted by A. Harnack, *Medizinisches aus der aeltesten Kirchengeschichte* (Leipzig, 1902), 22.

[46] *Bundahišn,* fol. 60v.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 189.

[47] *Bundahišn,* fol. 59r.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 183; see also Ph. Gignoux, *Man and Cosmos in Ancient Iran,* Serie Orientale Roma no. 91 (Rome, 2001), 53.

[48] *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others,* 265: "As the accused Ahriman has produced the silk-worm and the bee for doing harm to the creation of Ormazd and for the destruction of trees, so the Creator Ormazd has, through His wisdom, produced this advantage there for the greatest good of His creatures, that when the silks are artificially wrought and prepared, i.e. when they are dyed, they are proper for the embellishment of mankind if

In antiquity, the spread of lice and similar animals was connected to the idea of virulent plague. As their mode of reproduction was not yet accurately understood, they were supposed to arise asexually. We find this idea in the Bible concerning the birth of bees and also in the Latin literature: the myth of Aristée in Virgil's *Georgics.*[49]

The *Bundahišn* describes the reproduction of specific insects resulting from their waste: "of the fly one says that when it defecates on meat, the worm is evolved, the flea when it defecates on earth, the gnat when it defecates in the atmosphere, the small snake when it defecates on the perch of the pigeon, and the leech when it defecates in water." "Of the ant it is manifest that if nothing destroys its nest for three hundred years, it is revealed as a winged snake."[50]

According to Zoroastrian belief, humanity can also enable the reproduction of evil creatures. Broadly, whatever is separated from the body is considered dead matter and, therefore, unclean and requiring purification. The purification rites serve above all to free one from the contamination that evil brings to the body, and there are complex practices related to eliminating dead matter. Failure to comply with rules relative to specific

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they are worn. The bee-hive should be purified and made ready by a *Herbad* for the priests and by a *Behdin* for the *Behdins* and (then) they should wash their hands and extract (honey) from the bee-hive and then it is proper, if it is eaten as medicine and for (effecting) a cure. On this side here (i.e. Persia), we consecrate cotton clothes with the *Darun* on the dawn of the fourth day (after death), because cotton grows from the earth and is nourished by water; for this reason it is more precious (than silk)." For almost a thousand years, silk was the principal economic and political pivot of the countries that produced and commercialized it. Among these countries, Persia was particularly important during the Sasanian period, for it controlled the Occidental straits of the "Silk Road" and, thus, overland transportation of silk to the Far East. See A. Jeroussalimskaja, "Soieries sassanides," in *Splendeur des Sassanides* (Bruxelles, 1993), 113–19.

[49] Judg. 14:8. Lice, mentioned in Exod. (8:15), is the third plague that God brought on the Egyptians. The Egyptian magicians were not able to produce lice using their own magic, which caused them to say "this is the finger of God." Aristaeus, Apollo's son, taught people to cultivate olive trees and breed bees. One day he involuntarily caused the death of Eurydice. To revenge her, the nymphs, her companions, killed all of Aristaeus's bees. An episode of *Georgics* is inspired by this legend: four bulls were sacrificed to calm the irritated spirits of Eurydice. A swarm of bees escaped from the entrails of these animals (Virgil, *Géorgiques,* trans. E. de Saint-Denis [Paris, 1995], bk. 4, 76). Jahez, a famous Arab prose writer (776–868 CE), says on this subject: "We note that cadavers give birth to worms as well as refuse. This is why Zoroastrians, after they defecate, cover their excrement with earth to prevent the generation of worms. Zoroastrians never defecate in wells or cesspools because they respect too much the earth to soil it by their defecations. Likewise, spontaneous generations occur in the hearts of palm trees of many flying creatures, like birds or similar animals, for example woodlice, or the animal that they call in Persian *fadhu,* weevil (*sus*), wood worms, termites, animals born in the tree trunks, cockroaches in the latrines. In Khorasan, one can see that snow which accumulates in the vaulted arches (*azāj*) completely transforms to frogs" (*Kitāb al-Hayawan* [Cairo, 1905–7], 3:369–72).

[50] *Bundahišn,* fol. 60r.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 187; *The Pahlavi Rivāyat,* chap. 21.2.

dead matter has positive consequences for evil creatures. Hair and nails are dead parts, and their elimination is described in the Zoroastrian texts in detail.[51] One had to bury them in the ground away from the habitation of humans. If hair and nails were left unburied, it was believed that they would lead to the increase of evil animals, such as lice, that destroy corn and clothes.[52] The deliberate scattering of nails and hair was considered a sinful act through which a person worshipped demons and produced evil animals.[53] Hair and nails have been considered instruments of magic or evildoing among many traditions. According to the Persian *Zartušt-nāma* (1278 CE), the enemies of Zarathustra accused him of sorcery by secretly placing hair, nails, blood, and similar impurities in his room.[54]

From several passages of Zoroastrian literature we see that snakes and wolves have a close association with the Evil Spirit. Snakes have been implicated in many religious beliefs; they evoke the evil or secret forces of the earth. In the beginning of *History of Animals,* Aristotle (384–22 BCE) presents different classifications of species. In the one that he calls the "Psychology of Animals," he characterizes the snake as the model of perfidious and treacherous creatures.[55] In Zoroastrian texts the snake is described as the principle of Evil, enemy of humans, and accomplice of the Evil Spirit, "the most sorcerous and the most long-lived, for it lives two thousand years."[56] It is wholly evil, and killing it removes great sins and pollutions.[57]

In Middle Persian the terms *mār, gaz, garzag, šēbāg,* and *az* (Avestan *aži-,* "dragon, snake") are used for the snake, but the most common term is *mār,* which may derive from **marθra,* "killer."[58] Several species of snakes are mentioned in the *Bundahišn:*[59]

[51] *Vidēvdād,* chap. 17.5; *Saddar Nasr and Saddar Bundehesh,* chap. 14, 13–14.

[52] See P. O. Skjaervø, "Of Lice and Men and the Manichean Anthropology," in *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik Festschrift George Buddruss,* ed. R. Söhmen-Thieme and O. V. Hinüber (Reinbek, Germany, 1994), 273–75.

[53] See K. M. Jamasp-Asa, "The Ritual of Hair Trimming and Nail Paring in Zoroastrianism," in *Acta Iranica, Hommages et Opera Minora,* vol. 7, *Monumentum Georg Morgenstierne I* (Leiden, 1981), 321; for modern times, see Ph. G. Kreyenbroek and Sh. Neville Munshi, *Living Zoroastrianism* (Curzon, 2001), 40.

[54] *Le livre de Zoroastre* (*Zarâtusht Nâma*) *de Zartusht-I Bahrâm Ben Pajdû,* ed. F. Rosenberg (St. Petersburg, 1904), chap. 43, 47. Hair was also connected to the idea of resurrection. The *Bundahišn,* states that "at the time [of resurrection], bones will be demanded from the spirit of the earth, blood from water, hair from the plants, and life from fire, as they were accepted by them in the creation" (fol. 95r.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 285).

[55] Aristotle, *Histoire des animaux,* trans. J. Tricot (Paris, 1987), 1:488b, 16.

[56] *Bundahišn,* fol. 59v.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 187. *The Pahlavi Rivāyat,* chap. 21.2.

[57] *Vidēvdād,* chap. 14.5; *The Pahlavi Rivāyat,* chaps. 21a.6–7; 21b.2.

[58] P. O. Skjaervø, "AŽDAHĀ," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (London, 1989), 3:191.

[59] *Bundahišn,* fols. 59r., 59v.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 185.

mār, "snake"
az, "dragon"
aẓdahāg ī dō kamāl, "two-headed dragon"
aẓdahāg ī haft kamāl, "seven-headed dragon"
nōg-lābag šagr-gōnag, "of nine folds, lion-like" (?)
karzang dumbag syā, "the black-tailed crab"
šēbag wēšagīg, "wood viper"
šēbag zamīgīg, "sand viper"
mārān -doš (?)
mārān -ihā, "snake-like" (?)

There is also a snake that has venom in its eyes and kills man by the sting of its gaze, and one that, from a distant place, drags oxen, sheep, horses, and men to itself and devours them.[60]

The classifications of evil animals offered by the Middle Persian texts are sometimes so intricate and confusing that it is impossible to relate references to size, number of heads, or other criteria to creatures known to us. The difficulty of proposing identifications is compounded because the descriptions often mix fantastic features with realistic elements. Evil animals could be envisaged and depicted not only as normal creatures recognizable within the everyday world, but also as fantastic beasts with multiple heads or composite forms. One medium used to stress the monstrosity of the snake is the multiplication of its head or its extraordinary dimensions.

The snake, the animal that often lends its image to numerous monsters that haunt the dead and their world, appears as one of the most typical characters in the world of hell; the monstrous vision of the realm of the dead finds one of its privileged representatives in snakes. It manifests the terror inspired by the underworld in a plurality of personages and attitudes that are tied to the theme of the dead. In his journey to hell, Ardā Virāz saw a snake with several bodies and a human head. It was the soul of a wicked man who, in the world, committed apostasy and fled into hell in the form of a snake.[61]

Most ancient Near Eastern societies were afraid of venomous reptiles and insects, but it is perhaps more than coincidence that the magical incantations that have survived largely concern the same animals. For instance, in spite of the belief in the chthonian origin of the snake and the repugnance and fear inspired by this animal, Iranians used *Mārnāmeh* (The book of snakes) to foretell the future. The book, a small metrical composition

[60] *Bundahišn,* fol. 59v.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 185.
[61] Gignoux, ed., *Le Livre d'Ardā Virāz,* chap. 36, 182.

in modern Persian of thirty-two couplets, enumerates the thirty days of a Zoroastrian month and describes the omens that the sight of a snake presents on those days.[62] The omens pertain to public affairs and specify conduct to attract or avoid increase, possession or loss of property, journeys, satisfaction of wishes, grief, and other troubles.

Among wild animals created by the Evil Spirit, the wolf appears to have a close relation with the Evil Spirit and demons. It is always described as distorted and satirical, with an excess of negative values: the Evil Spirit produced the thievish wolf, small and worthy of darkness, offspring of darkness, of obscure stock, of black body, biting, without hair, and sterile.[63]

The wolf represents the wild state of life and is the emblematic enemy who acts without regard to the rules of civil society. It is engaged in a cruel and merciless battle against the domestic species whose reproduction is controlled by humans—the typical opposition is between the wolf and the sheep, that is, the dichotomy between wild and domestic states. The *Dēnkard* describes the wolf as a monstrous demon that haunts and damages human beings, and there are four-footed and two-footed wolves, that is to say the latter are in human form but are essentially wolflike in character.[64]

The creation of the wolf is directly attributed to the Evil Spirit, which desired to create the species in secret, in the form of fever, disease, and other evils, so that men would not see them when they come upon them.[65] However, Orhmazd, to the great advantage of his creatures, formed the bodily shapes of the wolf species and showed them to Ahriman. On account of his inferior knowledge, Ahriman approved of them by saying that Ohrmazd did what he had chosen to do. Ohrmazd then attached evil to those shapes and made them corporeal. As a result of this trick, the creatures of Ohrmazd can see and avoid them.[66] According to the *Bundahišn,* Ahriman produced the wolf in fifteen species:[67]

gurg, "wolf"
gurg ī syā, "black wolf"
babr, "tiger"

[62] *Dārāb Hormazyār's Rivāyat,* ed. E. M. R. Unvālā (Bombay, 1922), 2:193–94; J. J. Modi, "The Persian Mârnâmeh, or the Book for Taking Omens from Snakes," in *Anthropological Papers* (Bombay, 1912), 1:34–42.

[63] *Bundahišn,* fol. 60v.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 189; de Menasce, *Le Troisième livre du Dēnkart,* chap. 108, 110.

[64] De Menasce, *Le Troisième livre du Dēnkart,* chap. 94, 100; Madan, ed., *Dēnkard,* bk. 8, 723, line 10; see also A. Tafazzoli, "Un chapitre du *Dēnkard* sur les guerriers," in *Res Orientales* (Bures-sur-Yvette, France, 1995), 7:297–301.

[65] De Menasce, *Le Troisième livre du Dēnkart,* chap. 95, 101.

[66] *Bundahišn,* fol. 61r.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 191; *The Pahlavi Texts,* 123.

[67] *Bundahišn,* fols. 60v., 61r.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 189.

šagr, "lion"
palang, "panther"
yōz, "cheetah"
xaftār, "hyena"
tōrag, "jackal"
gōrkan, "cave digger"
karzang, "crab"
gurbag, "cat"
būg, "owl"
gurg ī ābīg, "aquatic wolf"
kōsag, "shark"
*gurg ī *čarnāk ʻčarnāk,* "wolf" (?)

Beasts of prey are generally identified as evil animals in Zoroastrian literature, but it was certainly difficult for the priests to proscribe all of them, particularly those which enjoyed court and popular esteem. Thus, the *Bundahišn* states that some of the evil wolf species are avoided out of fear, but others can be tamed, such as the elephant and the lion; the lion was created by the Evil Spirit, but according to a model established by the Beneficent Spirit.[68] The lion had a venerable place in Iran as a symbol of kingship. Undoubtedly this was in part for the simple reason that the lion was observable as a powerful and beautiful wild animal.[69] The elephant imported to Persia from India was probably counted among the evil animals because of its unfamiliar appearance, and classifying it with the lion must have been influenced by the association of both animals with royalty, for only kings kept and used them for hunting and warfare.

Evil animals in general, and wolves and snakes in particular, are found throughout Zoroastrian literature as similes and metaphors. The richness of these similes exemplifies how Zoroastrian narratives developed elaborate figurative passages based on perceptions of the behavior of animals. The wolf was often seen as the exemplary enemy of Iranians.[70] To kill wolves was an act of great merit.[71] A mythic tradition states that Zarathustra was

[68] *Bundahišn,* fol. 61v.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 191; see also *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others,* 270.

[69] See M. C. Root, "Animals in the Art of Ancient Iran," in *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East,* ed. B. J. Collins (Leiden, 2002), 169–209.

[70] *Dēnkard,* bk. 8, 730.

[71] See *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others,* 269. According to *The Pahlavi Rivāyat* (chap. 47.18–19), when Zarathustra invites Wištāsp for the second time to accept the religion, "Wištāsp said: 'One sinful act of mine is so [great] that if I accept the religion, even then it will not benefit my soul, for in [my] first battle I slew 6,000 in [my] second 5,000, and in [my] third 5,000. When I did battle again, [in my] first I slew 1,000, [in my] second 10,000, and [in my] third 1,000. Zoroaster said: [There is] no sin at all in slaying them, for they were the offspring of wolves. You [did] well when you slew them!"

killed by a Turanian, Tūr ī Brādrēš, who had the manner of a wolf.[72] The wolf also appears as a devourer of cadavers in the Zoroastrian literature; it is among the carrion eaters beside birds and dogs.[73] However, its presence in the domain of death may be derived simply from the fear that its carnivorous figure inspired.

The Evil Spirit and his demons manifest themselves as evil animals such as frogs and flies. The female carrion demon, Nasu, rushes on a dead body from the direction of the north in the form of a swift fly, with crooked knees, projecting buttocks, and unlimited phlegm.[74] She enters the body through one of its openings and attacks anyone or anything that comes in contact with it.

Among *xrafstar*s, the frog was regarded as the most despised animal. In the Zoroastrian doctrine, the polluting effect of decay sets in immediately upon death in the corpses of pious men and good animals, while the corpses of sinners and evil animals cause much less contamination or none at all. The degree of pollution caused by the dead body to those in its proximity depends on the position of the creature in the hierarchy of living beings. The *Vidēvdād* (chap. 5) gives a list of the degree of contamination caused by a person who or a member of the canine species that dies in the proximity of other people. The most contaminating is the dead body of an orderly Zoroastrian priest who in life has been a powerful agent for cleansing the world around him. It then continues on a descending range: warrior, tiller, sheepdog, watchdog, bloodhound, small hunting dog, hedgehog, and so on. The least contaminating is the corpse of a wicked, heretical person. The text states that the corpse of a heretic pollutes as much as does that of a frog when it has dried out for a year.[75] In chapter 18 of the *Vidēvdād,* the evil caused by Jeh, the female arch-demon, is mentioned. In one instance she is compared to a frog "of one thousand brood when it falls forth on the water."[76]

In contrast to the beneficial and sacred animal that it was among the Egyptians, the cat was considered an evil animal among Persians and was associated with demons and sorcerers. Jahez makes allusion to the position of Zoroastrianism regarding the cat as an Evil Spirit's creature and the rat as a creature of the Beneficent Spirit; he criticizes this position in mentioning the damage that rats can cause and the usefulness of the cat as a predator of rats.[77] It should be noted that the West misunderstood the

[72] *The Pahlavi Rivāyat,* chap. 47.22–25.
[73] Ibid., chap. 24.1.
[74] *Vidēvdād,* chaps. 7.2–3; 8.16–18, 71; 9.26.
[75] Ibid., chap. 5.36.
[76] Ibid., chap. 18.65.
[77] *Kitāb al-Hayawān,* 4:298–300, 5:319–22.

cat and treated it with indignation until modern times. The cat is absent in the Bible and also in the Physiologus.[78]

Ancient Iranians considered the cat restive and perfidious in contrast to the loyal dog. As nomads, they would have known the cat only as a wild animal, simply because the cat did not live under their tents and, unlike the dog, did not hold any place in their social or religious traditions. According to the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg,* the meat of cats, as well as other evil animals such as mice, snakes, foxes, and hyenas, was part of the diet of Arabs and Berbers.[79]

According to the worldview of Zoroastrians, the duration of the world is conceived as a sort of cosmic year, consisting of 12,000 calendar years divided into four periods of 3,000 years each, and it is in the fourth and last period that the Evil Spirit and its creatures will be powerless and unable to do harm to other creatures. Descendents of Zarathustra will be born at each of the three millennia through his semen, miraculously preserved in Lake Kąsaoiia. It is in the beginning of the millennium of Ušēdar, the first savior, that the shape of the wolves will be destroyed.[80]

> The [members of the] wolf species will all go to one place, and in one place they will be merged, and there will be one wolf whose breath [will be] 415 paces and length 433 paces. And on the authority of Ušēdar they [the Mazdā-worshippers] will muster an army, and they will go to battle with that wolf. First they will perform the *Yasna,* and through their *Yasna* [it will] not [be] possible to withstand [them]. Then Ušēdar will say: "With the sharpest and broadest blades find a means [to destroy] that demon of great strength." And then men will slay that demon, with whip and dagger and mace and sword and lance and arrow and other weapons. And for one *parasang* around, poison from that demon will envelop the earth and plants and they will burn. Out of that a demon [?] will scamper [in] the form of a black locust, and it will go into the demon of the serpent, and in that will be its habitation; for this reason it will not [any longer] be very oppressive.[81]

In the millennium of Ušēdarmāh, the second savior, the descendants of the snakes and other evil creatures will perish.[82] When only three months are left until the Resurrection, there will be a great battle similar to the

[78] Physiologus was the most widely known animal book during the Middle Ages. It was composed in the second century CE. The author added Christian moralizations, illustrated by quotations from the Bible, to short descriptions of the physical traits of animals.

[79] *Ayātkār ī Zāmāspīk,* ed. S. I. Messina (Rome, 1939), chap. 8.7, 51–52.

[80] *Bundahišn,* fol. 93v.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 281.

[81] *The Pahlavi Rivāyat,* chap. 48.5–9; de Menasce, *Le Troisième livre du Dēnkart,* chap. 102, 105.

[82] *Bundahišn,* fol. 93v.; *Zand Âkâsîh,* 281; de Menasce, *Le Troisième livre du Dēnkart,* chap. 229, 242.

battle at the beginning of the creation in the fight with the Lie. After thirty days of this battle, rain, killer of evil creatures, will appear.[83] "[Members of the] serpent species will all go to one place, and in one place they will be merged, and there will be one serpent, 833 paces in breadth, 1,666 paces in length, and on the authority of Ušēdarmāh the Mazdā-worshippers will muster an army and they will go into battle with that serpent. When they arrive, Ušēdarmāh will say: 'Perform the *Yasna!*' and they will perform the *Yasna,* and they will chase that demon away, and for one *frasang* poison from that demon will envelop the earth and they will burn."[84] The relationship between humans and evil animals in the Zoroastrian religion can be summarized as one of constant hostility. In fact, these animals are perceived as a permanent threat to man and his efforts to cultivate the earth. They are threatening insofar as they stand as the agents of impurity, disease, damage, or scourge, just as an encounter with a wild beast, in which man was in general defenseless, is a threat. The elimination of impurity, disease, and in fact all scourges is therefore the basis of the Zoroastrian religion's prescription regarding the destruction of evil animals. To keep them out of the way of man and his habitat must be a constant battle. For Zoroastrians, an evil animal is the most significant sign of the disruption of the creational order. The fierce battle directed against these animals reflects the battle between good and evil. Because the Zoroastrian religion is marked by the feeling that evil is powerful, a constant battle is required to hold it back from all "fronts" of creation.

In Zoroastrian literature, the Evil Spirit's creation has a negative character because it begins in opposition to that of the Beneficent Spirit. The material state is the creation of the Beneficent Spirit; the Evil Spirit can only attack, contaminate, and corrupt it. Vanquishing its malignant power reduces the power of the Evil Spirit and prepares for a day when it will be incapable of ravaging the fields, transmitting disease, or otherwise harming human interests.

Contrary to our modern conception, which aims for a zoological science cleared of all a priori metaphysics and all value judgments about the animal kingdom, in the Zoroastrian vision the "qualifying" criteria prevail over the quantitative, the absolute over the relative. It is not the numerical unbalance or the dissolution of the predator-prey relation that threatens creation, it is the existence of certain species created "in opposition" to the Good creation. Long before contemporary efforts to exterminate wolves, coyotes, rattlesnakes, and prairie dogs, Zoroastrians were invested in a

[83] *Anthologie de Zādspram,* chap. 34.52.
[84] *The Pahlavi Rivāyat,* chap. 48.26–28.

selective extermination role that remained until recently a mark of the beliefs inherited from ancient Iran.[85]

In the image of the world as it was represented by Zoroastrians, no animal could be neutral or indefinite, and man could not remain indifferent toward any species. In fact, it was the religious duty of enlightened men to understand this world of animals and interfere to help the Good prevail and to contribute to the extinction of Evil. Such action was an extremely important part of their engagement as believers. This dichotomy meant that there was hardly any place for a global vision allowing for the autonomy of the animal world. We should not forget that the Zoroastrian point of view of animals moved more often from the metaphysical toward the physical, but a physical world that did not always reach its goal. Mythic or monstrous animals are simple examples of this.

Reptiles, carnivores, parasites, insects, and other evil animals are associated with religious acts so that they may be expelled from everyday life. Animals in general have a fundamental role in Zoroastrian religion, and they play an intermediary role between the divine and human worlds depending on how each species is defined as belonging to Good or Evil creation.

Columbia University

[85] See J. A. Tober, *Who Owns the Wildlife? The Political Economy of Conservation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, CT, 1981), 23–28. The federal Wildlife Services program (formerly called Animal Damage Control) slaughters tens of thousands of coyotes each year (about 86,000 in 1999). Federal extermination efforts have been conducted since 1885, and during the past fifty years about 3.5 million coyotes have been killed (M. Bekoff, "Tireless Tricksters, Protean Predators, Coyotes Adapt to Wasteful Human Extermination Ploys," *Daily Camera* [November 18, 2001]). During the last half of the nineteenth century, the antiwolf campaign was most active in the western part of the United States, and no one knows how many animals were killed. By 1900, there were not many wolves left in the western United States. In 1919, the government joined the antiwolf campaign, passing a law that called for the extermination of wolves on federally owned lands. By 1942, when the law was abolished, 25,000 more wolves had been killed by the government plan.